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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Radio Service

OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, February 12, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "WEIGHT WORRIES." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics and the Food and Drug Administration, United States Department of Agriculture.

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From what I read about Ethiopia, the more a lady weighs over there, the more likely she is to win a beauty contest. I hear that in that country weight in women is not only a mark of beauty but of aristocratic birth. And again from hearsay, I understand that Haile Selassie's wife, the present empress, weighs around 300 pounds and that her subjects all admire her looks.

Right here in America we also admired chubbiness once upon a time. You've heard about the days when ladies wore bustles to improve their figures. And some of you even remember when stylish girls pinned on ruffles for the same purpose. Back when mother was a girl, feminine curves were very much the fashion. The plump lady was the one who decorated the pages of the fashion magazine.

Times do change, don't they? The slim and slender girl gets the admiration these days. And the buxom lass is all too likely to be a wall-flower at a party. That is why so many people who incline to plumpness try in all sorts of ways to take off pounds and flatten out curves. This effort to trim the figure -- oh, it does lead us into doing all kinds of strange things.

For example, I have one overweight friend who spends several days every now and then taking no nourishment but water and fruit juice. Her husband says she's as cross as a bear in the springtime during these dieting sessions. And she admits that she feels half sick and miserably weak. But she firmly believes that such punishment is the only way to melt her too, too solid flesh.

Still another friend of mine doesn't care to diet so she spends her money trying all the anti-fat devices she sees advertised. Her house is a museum of reducing contraptions. She has everything from machines for shaking off pounds to bath-tablets for soaking them off and lavender rollers for rolling it off. Yet she keeps right on gaining.

But the doctors and nutritionists who have made a serious study of this matter of weight don't agree with these friends of mine. They say plainly and definitely that excess weight is the result of one of two causes. One is simply overeating and lack of exercise. The other is some abnormal condition of the glands or the digestion. Of course, if your weight comes from an abnormal condition, then your physician is the one to consult about reducing. But if you are like most overweight people, your trouble is too much food and too little exercise. So just plain common sense answers that the way to get rid of those pounds is to eat less and exercise more.

That's no news to you. Diet and exercise is an old and often tedious story to most people. But a lot of plump people don't know that diet and exercise can take off weight safely and successfully or that it can also ruin health and disposition, all depending on the way you do it. Some reducing diets are sane and sensible -- good for you. Others can do a lot of damage. As for the anti-fat preparations you can buy, I have the facts on them from the Food and Drug officials. They say that fat-cures fall into two classes. You can take your pick. One kind is harmless and worthless. Others are dangerous. An example of the latter is any reducing remedy containing thyroid extract. Thyroid extract, unless you take it under a doctor's care, can cause fever, palpitation of the heart, even collapse, coma and death.

Let's not believe in fairy stories even when they sound so pleasant in the advertisements. No one yet has discovered a magic formula that can change a fat lady into a sylph in the twinkling of an eye -- or even in the course of a few weeks without harming her health. Don't let the diet faddists or the false advertisers fool you. The safe way to reduce is slowly and steadily and comfortably with well-planned regular meals along with a sensible way of living. This right kind of reducing often pays in better health.

A safe reducing diet isn't just what you eat. It is both what and how much you eat that counts -- especially how much. Every diet, whether it is for a fat, or thin, or just-right person, if it is to be safe, must be founded on what the nutritionists call protective foods -- that is, the minerals, vitamins, and protein needed every day to keep the body running and in good order. Yes, and you also need some energy food, no matter what your weight. The first rule in a safe reducing diet is: Go slow on the calories; cut down on fats and starches and sugars and on all dishes high in any one of these ingredients.

But just because you have to cut down on the fattening foods, you don't have to go around with a hungry feeling inside that spoils your pleasure in life. You can fill up on the foods that don't build fat, especially the bulky foods.

For the backbone of your safe reducing diet count on milk -- skimmilk or buttermilk, if you like it, or cottage cheese. Count on fruits and on vegetables. Count on lean meat, lean fish, and eggs. Eat sparingly of the cereal foods and use mostly whole-grain products.

So much for the foods to count on. Now for the foods to count off -- or, at least to count to the minimum. Well, stay away from rich gravy, rich sauce, thick oily salad dressing, fat meat, and fat fish. And avoid pastries and sweet desserts, rich cakes, cookies and candy. Finally, go slow on butter and cream, and on all breads, pancakes, biscuits and breakfast cereals.

The nutritionists say not to feel discouraged if the scales fail to show a loss in weight at once. Remember that safety lies in losing slowly. You see, whatever you weigh is a total of both tissue and water. Often the body holds water temporarily while the fatty tissue is being used up. So keep at your sensible and comfortable reducing diet 3 or 4 weeks before you expect much progress. And while you are dieting, keep up a good health routine of systematic rest, fresh air, sunshine and exercise. By the way, you know, exercise is to burn up body-fat. No use taking it at all if it turns out to be an appetizer that makes you eat twice as much food afterward.

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